Dear Gerry, 3/10/92

With the books packaged and ready to be mailed and a short while before supper, and on the chance what I say and enclose may have some sociological value, this hasty account of my former schoolmate who has earned herself a reputation that surprises me in her interest in preserving an aspect of the culture from which she comes, Italian. Until I read this story I did not know that she was born there. She came as an infant, had no accent at all, and had a largely unhappy life, attributable to her husband.

We lived across the street from each other and were in the same classes in late elementary and grammar school. There was only one high school and I do not remember her in it. I'm sure her people could not afford to send her to the Catholic high school.

We then lived in an Italian neighborhood, mostly immigrants, the adults, that is, and a warm and traditional Italian neighborhood it was. Including such things as making wine during prohibition.

When my father died our neighbors somehow knew of sitting shiva, when there is no work, no cooking. They unasked brought meals. (I was then in college.) When he died, the men recognized me as the head of the family and I was invited to the rotating Saturday night drinking, binges, when they all got drunk. And the women were no more than servants, standing around awaiting to be asked for service or to volunteer it. Even when they were about to deliver babies! One of the men who was not in on those Saturday nights was Josephine's father. I do not recall why but perhaps because he was a little older.

However, speaking no English, he took me to his basement, showed me his barrels of wine, a new one each year, and we tasted.

Josephine's husband was a neer do well who had a candy store as a front for numbers and perhaps other illicit activities. She was always friendly with my mother but when she was ashamed to talk to her own family, probably her mother only because she was the oldest of the children, she talked to my mother. Their friendship continued until my mother's death.

The Sons of Italy had a marching band and the Sunday's were their days. In addition to more traditional music they played what was popular with the Italian fascists. They marched in uniform when I'm sure buying the uniforms was a heavy cost.

Josephine's father made $10 a week as a gardener for one of the DuPonts. He walked both ways daily and it was a long walk. But their children, of whom there were many, did not want for food.

Her mother and mine were friends, too. Her mother was still cooking on a coal or wood kitchen stove. I know because I was in that kitchen often, whenever Mrs. Volzone had a surpluss of peppers. Knowing how much I liked them, fried Italian style, she invited me to enjoy them.

As with other ethnic groups of that pre-Great Depression era there were a number who never learned to speak English. Both Zampinis, who lived next to us, never did and they

then had grandchildren. There were jobs for the men in that pre-mechanization period as there also were for blacks but they made less. Zampini worked in a wool factory. Figliola, who used the name Fisher, was a garbage man who spoke no English. Mrs. Ferarra, who spoke little English and also had the same old-fashioned wood or coal cook stove, still made her own pasta and my how her sauce gave the whole neighborhood and apetite on summer days when there was no air conditioning. She, if you never saw this, rolled each strand over a wife to make the pasta. When that they cost only about 10¢ a pound, maybe 20¢.

(We had a corner grocery and had 10-12 different kinds but I'm not sure of the price.)

The story refers to St. ~~Anthon~~ Anthony's church. It then was new, fine and large. The priest was a Father Francis Tucker. He was an overt Mussolini fascist and never suffered for it! He had all those Italian women giving him their wedding and other rings for him to send to Musso (Mus. Ethiopia). I do not recall a single complaint or any newspaper report of it.

I suppose that Josephine's mother taught her how to sew and other such skills but I had no knowledge of ~~them~~ it. She had a remarkably fine singing voice and from another environment might have been a professional singer.

I am inclined to think that she developed the cultural interests when she finally had to recognize the fact that her husband, Vincent, was also running around and with time on her hands got interested.

She and her sisters were fine people. I'll be surprised if all but one of her numerous brothers did not get into trouble.

The Catholic men in our neighborhood rarely went to church and the women rarely didn't.

There was even one Italian family within not much more than 100 feet whose daughters could have dates only when they were chapperoned. They had very few dates!

As with many other peoples of that period, the 1920s-early30s, many of the Italians had no interest in anything not Italian, including language. Many spoke no English at all.

But when I took the pishka (collection box) around to raise money for the Jewish National Fund, for buying land in Palestine and sending it to Jews who lived there, rather for buying land for Jews and for reforesting, these Italians contributed so much I won first prize for children in the State of Delaware. Most came from Italian merchants.

Josephine did not live on Union Street, as the story indicates. She and we lived on the next street, Lincoln. Interesting that as the city spread westward Union and Lincoln were next to each other.

And I remember the Klan with a really massive march down Union! 1920s.

Best,

Harold